

MONICA'S SUMMER PLANS (1792 words)

Two days before what would have been the beginning of his twenty fifth year at St. John's Preparatory School for Boys, Jim stuck his head in an oven and lit a match. His obituary accurately stated he was fifty-two, but misstated he was survived by a wife and two sons, when in fact she was now his ex-wife of two months, and his sons were well, sons by birth but hadn't spoken to their father in many years. She didn't fly back from California to identify the remains of the remains, so the task fell to the sons who finally showed up at the morgue after four days and many unanswered phone messages. All the younger one could think of while staring at the body was how similar it looked to the mummies in the museum he visited when he was in elementary school and how they had given him nightmares for weeks. All the older one said was if you put a head on it and stretched out the legs it would probably be the right height. Besides, he added, how many people still wear acid washed jeans.

The headmaster announced his passing at the beginning of the first day of faculty meetings and by the end of the first day of faculty meetings everyone knew exactly how his passing came to be.

That's why it started.

If Jim had not worked in the office next to Monica it might have never began. Likewise, if she had not been working one Sunday morning and if she had not heard him sobbing and not gone over to check on him then perhaps her own existential dilemma would not have been triggered. But she did hear him, and she did try to console him, and his despair of being divorced and his distant children living in different parts of the country planted itself in her conscience like a stagnant virus that waits ever so patiently for the perfect time to replicate.

The following year her only daughter didn't return from college and accepted a position in Chicago and her husband's job changed so he was predominantly in Dallas. A few weeks later her husband told her over the phone that there was no job change, he had met someone. What followed should have been an awkward silence, at the least, but she mistook his someone for someone famous and eagerly replied, who, who did you meet? The reality sunk in when he paused, then replied, I moved here because I met someone. Then he added, I won't be flying back this weekend. Oddly she immediately rambled about how she should go about organizing his things, but he told her that wasn't necessary. There was nothing there he needed.

A month later, shortly after dinner, she opened her oven door and stuck her head inside. For some reason, she imagined Jim kneeling on the floor directly in front of the oven, but this was physically impossible for her. Her head did not reach the interior and when she took a moment to think about how the whole process would play out she came to the conclusion that she may indeed succeed but there was a good chance the burning would start with the arm holding the match and she could only hope it would possibly make its way to her brain. The intended manner of death seemed much more probable if she kneeled off to the side of the oven and snaked her head in that way but this didn't seem correct either, at least to her.

And she felt that when one killed oneself one should perform the act correctly.

Later that evening, she considered drowning. She only thought of this because New England was in the throes of a brutal July heatwave and she just wanted to cool off in a pool. But she didn't have a pool and drowning oneself in someone else's pool was not quite neighborly. So she considered swimming out into the ocean. But what if when she was way out there and there was no land in site she changed her mind. That would be miserable. And even if she did not change her mind she questioned the waiting. Do you just stop and let yourself sink?

She could not manage to wrap her mind around the exact procedure to obtain a quick and painless death and nothing about this method, in particular, seemed quick and painless.

She considered going to a lake. Maybe renting a rowboat or kayak then tying a big cement block to her leg and jumping overboard. But the logistics of obtaining a fifty pound lump of something and maneuvering it into her boat was overwhelming. Like burying yourself alive. An idea she also considered but there were way too many variables even though she did her best to limit them: dig the ditch in the cemetery, rent a decent size dump truck, pre-fill it with sand and rocks, then turn the engine on, start unloading, and fall into the hole. But she couldn't help wonder what if it stopped? What if she was lying in the hole and nothing happened? Maybe the engine stalled or the unloader mechanism jammed. Then what? Crawl out of the ditch and try to figure out what went wrong, then once she thought she solved the issue get back in the ditch, wait, and see if she was successful. And if it doesn't work again or if she couldn't get it working in the first place she'd have to leave and make sure she tested it before she tried again but who wants to test a suicide?

She thought of killing herself by jumping in front of a train because one of the aspects of drowning and burying herself alive which perturbed her was that it was not immediate. However, the logistics, again were not so simple. In fact, this method was not simple at all.

For example, it would have to be at night. And she would have to go to some remote place and know the train schedule. Then it would be just a matter of running in front of it. Wait and when she saw it coming jump out. But she was a bit concerned. Monica was by no means a train expert but she knew the tracks were uneven and she would have to get out in front of the train quick and what if she ran in front of the train and mistimed the whole deal and bounced off the side. Or maybe she timed it correctly but tripped on the tracks and her forward momentum

carried her to the other side so instead of the reward of death she wound up with some wonderful bruises and sprained extremities. Or perhaps she was successful. Perhaps she was able to get right in front of the train but somehow slid down between the rails perfectly and survived virtually unscathed.

But the worst scenario was not even making it. What if she tripped before reaching the tracks. Fell flat on her face and stared at the passing cars not watching her life unfold in seconds but witnessing the horrible realization that she failed miserably in such a simple task as snuffing out her existence. No. A train would not work.

But pills or poison might suffice. It would not be sudden but it would not be painful either. Nor did it appear to require much work. You ingest and wait. She had thought this was the perfect way to go until she started researching the particulars and stumbled upon an article about a woman who drank as much Vodka as she could handle, washing down all that was left of her sleeping pills only to wake up in a pool of vomit and blood on her kitchen floor. She crawled to the phone and dialed 911 and now she talks to high school students about suicide prevention.

She laughs about how she overdid it. That's what the doctors told her. She either drank too much Vodka or swallowed too many pills. Either way her stomach rejected the combination before it entered her blood stream.

Sure instead of pills and alcohol she could try rat poison or kerosene or gasoline or some other -ine but she couldn't stand the thought that maybe, just maybe, she would wake up in her own vomit and have to call 911 just to get strong enough to try again.

She didn't want to end up on some speaker circuit talking to half-interested high-schoolers about how things can or will get better and she is really, truly blessed. The thought terrified her and she knew there had to be other self-death methods.

Slitting her wrists? And then sit in a warm bathtub? Should she buy bubbles? That would be horrible. The person who found her would never be able to enjoy a bubble bath or maybe even bubbles after witnessing her blue corpse and all the iridescent bubbles stained with her crimson life. But a bath without the bubbles might work. Cut real good and wait. Again, like poison and pills it seemed easy enough. But then she wondered how long do you wait? What if the blood clotted? Of course she could take sleeping pills also. Put herself in a warm tub, pop a bunch of pills, slit her wrists and she'd fall asleep and be gone. But it bothered her that she might end up drowning rather than dying from slitting her wrists. Or she might fall asleep and the bath water would get cold and she'd die from hypothermia. She didn't like that either. There had to be some standards for suicide. She didn't like thinking about how people would whisper at her funeral how she tried killing herself by slitting her wrists but ended up drowning or freezing instead. It didn't seem right. Embarrassing even. If you killed yourself you had to kill yourself the way you planned to kill yourself.

And so why not jump? If she jumped, she'd die from jumping. No gray area there. And wouldn't it be wonderful to fly like a bird. Everyone wants to fly like a bird – like an albatross that drifts in the sky for years. That would be beautiful. And easy. All you need is a bridge. Of course it should be over water. It just should be. A nice high bridge and a beautiful windy day. Almost like twirling around in her yard as a child on a summer evening, spinning and spinning, staring at the sky until she tumbled down. She just needed to find that perfect bridge. So off she went. No maps or anything. The first faculty meeting was still two months away.